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THE
C H A R A C T E R
OF
DAVID KING of ISRAEL,

Impartially stated:

IN A
D I S C O U R S E
Preached before the
UNIVERSITY of CAMBRIDGE,
November 29. 1761.

BY
BEILBY PORTEUS, M.A.
FELLOW of CHRIST COLLEGE,
And one of the PREACHERS at
His MAJESTY'S CHAPEL at WHITEHALL.

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M.DCC.LXI.

THE
CHARACTER
OF
DAVID KING OF ISRAEL

DISCOURSE



BY
REVEREND PORTERUS M.A.
FELLOW OF CHRIST COLLEGE
And one of the Preachers at
His Majesty's Chapel at WHITEHALL.

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and T. Payne at the Museum

MDCCLXXI

TO
THE MOST NOBLE
THOMAS HOLLES
DUKE of NEWCASTLE,
CHANCELLOR
OF THE
UNIVERSITY of CAMBRIDGE,

THIS DISCOURSE
IS

With the greatest respect,

Inscribed,

By His GRACE's most dutiful

And most obedient Servant,

BEILBY PORTEUS.

TO
THE MOST NOBLE
THOMAS HOLLES
DUKE of NEWCASTLE
CHANCELLOR
OF THE
UNIVERSITY of CAMBRIDGE

THIS DISCOURSE

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With the greatest respect,

Inscribed,

By His GRACE's most devoted

And most obedient servant,

HENRY PORTER.

P R E F A C E.

SOME very open attacks having been lately made on the character of King *David*, and the authority of the sacred Writers, in a Pamphlet entitled *the History of the Man after God's own heart*; which however contemptible in point of argument to Men thoroughly acquainted with the language of Scripture, was yet by the boldness of its assertions, the vivacity of its humour, and the freedom of its remarks, extremely well calculated to seize the imagination of the gay, and impose on the credulity of the unexperienced; it seemed not improper or unseasonable in a place of publick Education to furnish the young mind with a few general Truths and leading Principles relative to the subject; to set the question in a proper point of view; to take off the disguise that Buffoonery had thrown over it; and to prepare the way for a more accurate discussion of particulars, which there is reason to expect soon from a Person well qualified for the undertaking. The attempt was received with a candour that is natural to men of improved understandings; and it being thought that the

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discourse might be of use beyond the precincts of the University, it is, on this presumption here submitted to the Publick; with the hopes of that indulgence which seems due, and is indeed seldom denied, to a good intention.

The reader has, I own, some reason to be out of humour with this Plea, when he finds it usurped by the very Author of that extraordinary Performance above mentioned; who is, it seems, extremely angry at having the *uprightness of his intentions* called in question. With what justice let the most candid determine. For, not to mention those occasional sallies of pleasantry upon every thing that is sacred with which in the course of his work he is perpetually refreshing himself, if according to *his way of thinking*, king *David* could not possibly be called the Man after God's own heart for any other reason, than that of the most unblemished purity of manners; and if, according to *his way of reasoning*, he was the most immoral Man that ever lived; the consequence *must* be, either that God is pleased with impurity, or that the Scriptures are full of absurdity. It is judging very charitably of the Author, to suppose he meant *only* to infer the latter.

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He cannot surely be so weak as to imagine that his readers will be imposed upon by his solemn professions of being influenced only by a *sincere love of truth*; (Pref. p. 9. and Hist. p. 94.) Professions, which are quite put out of countenance by the broad laugh that sits upon every line of his Enquiry: much less can he seriously expect any one to believe the motive he assigns for his engaging in so *useful a work*; viz. an *honest* desire of rescuing the reputation of the late King from certain injurious Parallels that have been drawn betwixt him and king *David*. (Pref. p. 6.) It is methinks paying but a very indifferent compliment to our late most excellent Sovereign to suppose it necessary for the vindication of his character, to spend above ninety pages in abusing another royal personage, who is thought in some instances to resemble him. And if the opinion which this Nation entertains of his present Majesty's regard for Religion be, as it certainly is, well founded; he will not think himself much obliged to a Man for defending his royal Grandfather from an imaginary insult at the expence of those sacred Books, for which he himself has constantly expressed the utmost reverence. The Author was right in

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thinking that *some* cover was necessary for irreligion: but a less noble one than the name of royalty might surely have served his purpose —

“ *What an impiety this to the Majesty of Heaven!*

“ *What an affront to the memory of an honest*

“ *Prince!* (Hist. of the Man, &c. p. 93.)

Nor does this Gentleman seem to have much more reason to pique himself upon his Invention than his Integrity; Though, (as is too often the case) it is probable that the latter has fallen a victim to the fond desire of acquiring a reputation for the former. The most material part of his objections are borrowed from Mr. Bayle, and it would have been well, if he had borrowed one thing more from him, his *decency*. The only thing that seems his own (and that indeed is entirely so) is a confidence, a licentiousness, and a disingenuity which are, I believe, without parallel. If the reader chuses to see all these united in one fair assemblage, I would recommend him to the insinuation conveyed by the Italics in the speech of Nabal's wife to David — “ *Upon me, my Lord, upon me, let this iniquity be;* and the subsequent illustrious capitals in king David's Answer, BEHOLD I

HAVE

P R E F A C E.

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HAVE ACCEPTED THY PERSON. Such a complication of indecency, dishonesty, and impiety, crowded into so small a compass, is not easy to be met with in any other *professed* advocate of truth.

After this instance, the well-meaning and unlearned Reader will not want any further caution against the artifices of this unfair and insidious writer; he will not suffer himself to be laughed out of his faith, and robbed of that charter of his salvation the Holy Bible, by one who thus wrests the plainest words to the most unnatural meaning, who thus prostitutes the sacred names of freedom, truth, and honesty, to the most shameful purposes. He will not suffer a few specious objections against particular passages to outweigh the whole collective evidence of Religion, nor the unsupported cavils of a man, who is by his own confession utterly disqualified to decide on any doubtful text, who is his own commentator, guide, and counsellor, (*Pref. p. xi.*) to invalidate the authority of books that have for ages been held sacred; which though written in the remotest times; and in a language not generally cultivated or understood, (and therefore liable to great difficulties and obscurities) are yet in every material point, plain, clear, and

and intelligible; are pregnant with the sublimest conceptions of the divine Nature, with the most interesting and affecting truths, the purest and most benevolent precepts that ever blessed mankind; have been received and countenanced by men of the profoundest learning, and the brightest parts in almost every age and nation of the world where they have been known. If amidst the numberless misrepresentations of this author, he meets with some things that stagger or disturb him; let him however suspend his judgment, and withhold his assent, till he sees what can be said on the other side of the question. In the mean while he may absolutely depend on the truth of the following assertions, — That this author has made a very unjustifiable use of the liberty he claims (*Pref. p. xi.*) of giving *his own* sense to what appears to *him* dark and confused — that by exercising such a privilege in the manner *he* has done, there is no character so sacred but may be made detestable, no merit so conspicuous but may be explained away into guilt — that where any passage or transaction is capable of two meanings, he constantly chuses the worst, and sometimes disguises it with forged circumstances, to make it capable of such a meaning as it would not
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otherwise admit — that he has revived many objections which he knows, or ought to have known, have long since received a satisfactory answer; — that he has grossly and wilfully misrepresented some of King *David's* most generous actions, and most amiable qualities; — that he delights in giving things a ludicrous or indelicate turn; — that directly contrary to his own profession of laughing only where he *must*, and being candid every where, he laughs wherever he *can*, and is candid *nowhere* — and lastly, that he has throughout the whole indulged a levity and wantonness of thought and expression utterly inconsistent with an *honest enquiry* into truth: for though we should grant him (what in some cases may perhaps be disputed) that truth requires no *tendernefs in the investigation* (p. 95.), yet it most indisputably requires *seriousness*; and though every manly and decent adversary of our faith is entitled to a fair hearing, and a candid interpretation of his sentiments and designs; yet whoever is so little in earnest, so abandoned to all sense of shame, as to introduce ridicule and obscenity into subjects that concern (even in the remotest degree) the eternal happiness of mankind, does from that moment

moment forfeit all claim to favour or belief.

As this author uses no reserve himself in expressing his indignation at every appearance of cruelty, he will not be surprized or offended at an equal freedom in censuring a species of it, which, (industrious as he is in such researches) seems to have escaped his notice. I mean the cruelty of infusing suspicions into honest unsuspecting hearts, of unfixing their principles, destroying their tranquillity, and perplexing them with doubts and difficulties, which, though really insignificant, yet for want of proper helps they are not able to surmount; and which often produce such distress and distraction of mind, as is not to be conceived but by those who have experienced it.

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S E R M O N, &c.

I S A M. xiii. 14.

The Lord hath sought him a Man after his own Heart, and the Lord hath commanded him to be Captain over his People.

THERE is no need to inform you, that the Person spoken of in these words is *David* King of *Israel*. The Appellation of *the Man after God's own heart*, is a well-known distinction, never *expresly*^a bestowed on any one but him. The reason of his being so distinguished, is generally presumed to have been the superior Excellence of his moral Conduct: because a God who is of purer Eyes than to behold Iniquity, can never be supposed to delight in it, which it is thought must be the case, if the *Man after his own heart* was in any degree an immoral Man. On the strength of this Supposition, some mistaken Friends of Religion, in order to vin-

^a Not in the very same words — but in expressions of the same import it is applied to others — *Abraham, Samuel, &c.*

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dicare

dicare God's choice, have thought it necessary to prove *David's* private Character unexceptionable^b, and some inveterate Enemies of Religion, in order to ridicule that choice, have taken no less pains to make him appear detestable; and it is hard to say, whether he has suffered more from the zeal of such defenders, or the wickedness of such accusers. The uninformed and unwary reader is also in equal danger from both: for if he credits those who have so much extolled King *David*, he will be apt to form to himself very faulty ideas of moral rectitude: if he listens to those who have so grossly reviled him, he will be led to entertain very injurious sentiments of the Divine Nature, and the sacred Writings.

To correct these mistakes, and to guard against these mischievous consequences, is the design of this discourse; and though a great part of this audience will have anticipated me in what I am going to say; yet to Those who are in most danger of being misled, to those who want the opportunity, or the inclination to examine accurately into these subjects, the following observations will, I hope, be of some use; and I shall be pardoned for enlarging a little on certain particulars, which

^b V. a certain panegyrical life of *David*, throughout.

though casually touched upon by others, are not perhaps so commonly known, have not been so fully explained, and so much attended to, as they deserve.

Whatever we are to understand by the Expression of *the Man after God's own heart*, it does not seem as if the Scriptures intended to lay so much stress upon it, as both the friends and the enemies of Religion have since done. For after having been just mentioned in the Text, there is no notice taken of it afterwards, nor does it once more occur throughout the whole Old Testament. Though we should therefore allow that it has a reference to *David's* Morality, yet it cannot be fairly charged with such important consequences either to Vice or Virtue, as some are willing to infer from it. — But the true light in which this passage ought to be considered seems to be that which follows.

It is, I believe, universally allowed, that the design of God in separating the Jewish Nation from the rest of mankind, was to perpetuate the Knowledge of Himself by means of this peculiar people, and to preserve the worship of the one true God amidst an idolatrous world. This was the grand foundation of the whole Jewish polity; the main purport of their laws, the principle of all God's dealings

towards them. Whoever therefore exerted himself vigorously and effectually in promoting this great end of the Jewish theocracy, might, with the strictest propriety, be called *a Man after God's own heart*; because he acted in conformity to *the main purpose of God's heart*; he did the very thing that God wanted to have done, he forwarded the grand design that he had in view. Now this was precisely the character of *David*, the distinguishing excellence of his life. He was a sincere and hearty lover of his Country, a zealous observer of its laws in opposition to all Idolatry; from which he ever kept himself and his people at the utmost distance^c. — It was not therefore on account of his *private Virtues*, but his *public Conduct*; not for a spotless purity of Manners, but for his abhorrence of Idolatry, and his strict adherence to the Civil and Religious^d laws of his Country, that *David* was honoured with the name of *the Man after God's own heart*. If any Christian writers have sup-

^c See Le Clerc on *Acts* xiii. 22. Patrick on *1 Kings* xv. 3. 5.

^d One very remarkable instance of *David's* scrupulous observance of the law, in punctually complying with the prohibition given in *Deut.* xvii. 16. against the use of Cavalry in War, See in Bishop *Sherlock* on Prophecy. Diff. 4. p. 370.—375. And perhaps his invariable obedience to this important law, “which was to be a standing trial of Prince and People, whether they had trust and confidence in “God their Deliverer,” might contribute not a little towards procuring him this so much envied distinction.—

posed that this title was the mark of *moral Perfection*, and in consequence of that have exalted *David's* character into a standard of Virtue, they have, with a very good meaning perhaps, done a very injudicious thing. The explanation here given is certainly most agreeable to the language of the Scriptures, to the whole tenour of *David's* conduct, to the nature of the Jewish Dispensation, and the intentions of its Divine Author.

To what has been urged in favour of this Interpretation, by a very eminent Writer^e, may be added; That, though *David* is in this single Passage called *the Man after God's own heart*; Yet it is afterwards only said of *Him*, in common with several other Kings, that He *did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord*; 1 Kings xv. 5. which Expression seems intended to convey, and indeed naturally does convey, the same meaning as the other. For it will not be easy to point out a difference betwixt acting *according to any one's heart*, and doing that which *is right in his eyes*. — By determining therefore the signification of this Phrase, we shall arrive at the true

^e V. Divine Legation of Moses — V. 3^d. B. 4. S. 6. p. 354. 3^d. Edit. — Where the late Historian of *David* might have found many of those difficulties which he says are beyond the power of *Lay-skill* to reconcile cleared up by the hand of a Master. —

value of that made use of in the Text. Now the Expression of *Doing that which is right in the eyes of the Lord*, is constantly and uniformly applied to those who were eminent not so much for their Virtues in a *private*, as their zeal in a *Regal* capacity; for their aversion to Idolatry and scrupulous observance of the law. — Thus when it is said of *Asa*, 2 Chron. xiv. 2, 3, 4. that *He* did that which was good and right in the eyes of the Lord; the reason assigned for it is; “because he took away
 “the altars of the strange gods, and the high
 “places, and brake down the images, and cut
 “down the groves, and commanded Judah to seek
 “the Lord God of their fathers, and to do the
 “law and the commandment.” — Not a word of his *moral character*, though from his doing that which was not only *right* but *good*, one might naturally have expected it. — Again, when we are told that *Solomon's heart* was not *perfect* with the Lord his God; that he went not *fully* after the Lord as did *David* his father; The proof alleged is, that his Wives turned away his heart after other gods—1 Kings xv. 4. Whence it evidently appears that the *perfection* of *David's heart*, its *full* and entire congruity with *God's heart*, consisted principally if not solely in his inviolable attachment to the worship of the true
 God,

God, from which he never deviated or turned aside, *either to the right hand or to the left.*

If this Explanation be, as it appears to be, conformable to Truth and Scripture, the following very useful consequences do naturally and immediately flow from it.

1st. That in order to vindicate God's choice of *a Man after his own heart*, or the truth of the Scriptures in relating it, there is no necessity to prove his moral Conduct *faultless*, or to obviate *all* the accusations which have been brought against him ; because this choice

^f It is observed (*Hist. of the Man after God's own heart.* p. 53.) that *David's* moral character seems to be pronounced *faultless* (1 Kings xx. 5.) except in the matter of *Uriah* — we reply, that the Scripture in this (as in many other places) must necessarily be understood to speak only in *general*; intimating that king *David's* conduct was in the *main* good and right, and though he might be guilty of other faults yet none of them were so gross and enormous, so directly repugnant to the *express commandments* of God as this, and therefore not so necessary to be pointed out and particularly distinguished. Whoever is well acquainted with the Scripture Phraseology must allow that it not only admits but perpetually requires such restrictions as this — Vid. *Matth.* v. 48. It must be further remarked; that the two parts of the verse in question (1 Kings xx. 5.) are entirely distinct, and independant of each other. The first part giving us *David's* *regal*, the other his *private* character. In his *regal*, “ *he did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord.*” and even in his private conduct, (adds the sacred Historian) he *turned not aside* (in any notorious degree) from what *God commanded him*, except in the matter of *Uriah*; No argument therefore can be founded on the exception in the latter part of the verse against the Interpretation above given of the former part, nor consequently against the uses made of that interpretation. —

having proceeded on other principles, his private conduct is foreign to the question.

2dly. That we cannot draw conclusions in favour of any crime, so as to justify it in ourselves, from its having been practiced by *the Man after God's own heart*. Because though his conformity to the divine Will in some *very material instances*, did justly entitle him to that Appellation; yet every vicious excess was in *him*, (as it must be in every human creature) the object of God's utter detestation, and very often too of his severest vengeance.

3dly. That they who have taken so much pains to ridicule and vilify the character of *David* with a view of wounding the Authority of the Scriptures through his sides, have only shown their malevolence without effecting their purpose. Because their whole reasoning being founded on a presumption that *David* was selected by God on account of some peculiar *moral Excellency*; this foundation being withdrawn, the whole superstructure of cavils and calumnies raised upon it falls entirely to the ground^s. Though they should have clearly

^s This holds more particularly true in regard to the History of *the Man, &c.* — where it is expressly affirmed, (*Pref.* p. 7.) that the Title conferred on *David* in the Text implies the *height of Purity*. This supposition runs through every page of the performance. — It is the vital Principle that animates the whole mass of falsehoods; and is effectually destroyed by the foregoing explanation.

shown,

shown, what I am sure never can be shown, that *David* was upon the whole a vicious Man; yet if he was a proper instrument in the hand of God for executing his favourite purpose, he might in that view be justly entitled to the distinction he obtained; nor could they from any irregularities in his moral conduct, infer either the impropriety of God's choice, or the falshood of the Scriptures; which being the only consequences they could possibly mean to establish, their arguments divested of them are most literally of no consequence; and if granted to be true, would only prove, what no mortal would ever dispute, that the Jews as well as other nations had sometimes unrighteous Princes to rule over them.

Let it not however be imagined that *David* is by any means to be ranked in this class. For though I am very far from thinking his moral character irreproachable; yet am I no less persuaded, that excepting those known and acknowledged crimes, which no one pretends to palliate or deny; every stain that has by impious and unhallowed hands been thrown upon his Name, may be fairly wiped away without leaving the least injury behind. It is not my design to enter into a particular confutation of all the calumnies and accusations which have been brought against

Him. It would not be suitable to the nature, or reducible to the usual bounds of a Discourse of this kind: it is a work reserved for the skill of some more able writer. In the mean while as the heaviest and indeed the only plausible charge which has been urged, not only against *David* but the whole Jewish nation, is that of cruelty; a charge, which without any of those exaggerations it has received, is of itself apt to make the deepest impressions on the honestest minds: a charge, which lies level to every capacity, as applying rather to the heart than to the head, as requiring rather that men should *feel* than that they should *think*; and which for that reason, every adversary of Religion never fails to urge with all and *more* than all its force; on this account I shall suggest a few considerations in regard to this Particular; which may serve to put the unwary a little upon their guard, to remove a unnecessary and invidious aggravations, and account in some measure, for what perhaps can neither be wholly justified nor excused.

We who live in these enlightened and polished times, when our manners are softened by the liberal arts, and our souls humanized by the benevolent spirit of Christianity, are shocked beyond measure at many things, which

in the ruder ages of antiquity were not looked upon with so much abhorrence as they deserve. We cannot help bringing those transactions home to ourselves, referring them to our own age and nation, supposing them to be done under the same advantages which we at present enjoy, and consequently as involving the same degree of guilt that we ourselves should incur by the commission of the same crimes. But though this is a very natural, it is by no means an equitable way of judging. In deciding on the merit or demerit of any men, or society of men, in a remote period, we ought certainly to take into consideration the general character of the times in which they lived, the peculiar modes of thinking, and rules of acting which then prevailed. If we apply this observation to *David*, we shall find that He lived in an age when the world seems to have been sunk in ignorance and barbarity; when men were divided into a number of petty kingdoms, and small communities; when they shut themselves up in *fenced cities*, and never went out of them but to fight with their neighbours; for every neighbour was of course an enemy^k.

^k The state of our own kingdom under the *Saxon Heptarchy*, may perhaps give us some faint idea of the barbarity of *all* kingdoms in the infancy of the world.

Scarcely any other art was then known but the art of war, which consisted in destroying as many as they possibly could, and enslaving the rest. In such a state of things it must necessarily follow that men familiarized to blood, and trained up to slaughter, must become insensibly steeled against the impressions of humanity, and contract a habit of cruelty, which would give a tinge to the whole current of their lives, impart even to the face of peace itself too sanguine a complexion, and discolour the whole intercourse of civil, social, and domestic offices. We are not then to wonder that the Jews themselves were infected with this epidemical ferocity of manners. We are not to charge them with more than their share of the common guilt, we are not to represent them as a people *distinguished* by their cruelty, but as constituting a consistent part of a barbarous world.

It may be thought perhaps, that though this way of reasoning is to be admitted in general, yet it has not the same force in regard to the Jews as when applied to any other nation; because they being God's chosen and peculiar people, ought to be found superior in benevolence as well as every other virtue to the rest of mankind. But it must ever be remembered,

membered, (what God himself frequently declares¹,) that it was not for their *own sakes*, for their *own righteousness*, that they were chosen, but for other reasons^m; for preserving the knowledge, and promoting the worship of the one true God; for manifesting his divine Power in working miracles, and for executing his judgments on those impenitent nations, whose enormous wickedness was then ripe for vengeance. The moral goodness therefore of the Jews being no peculiar object of God's choice, we are not on *that account merely* to expect from them any uncommon degrees of virtue, or any exemption from the reigning vices of their ageⁿ.

¹ Deut. ix. 4, 5.

^m And here by the way let it be remarked, that since God *might* and certainly *did* chuse to himself a *peculiar people*, for other reasons than that of eminent virtue; why might he not also chuse a *peculiar king* over that people for reasons of the same nature?

ⁿ One cannot but observe the pleasure with which the historian of *David* displays the instances he finds of Jewish cruelty, utterly unworthy, as he thinks, of God's people; a title which he every where invidiously gives them, with a modest insinuation at the same time, that this was a strange sort of a nation to be the favourites of Heaven, and that God was certainly most egregiously mistaken in making choice of such a savage race for his *peculiar people*. The mistake however appears to lie (exactly where it did, with regard to *David*) in this unfortunate gentleman's apprehension, who is not able to conceive any other reason for God's separating a particular nation from the rest of the world, but that of their superior goodness and virtue.

Nay, so little reason have we to expect any extraordinary instances of humanity from the peculiarity of their circumstances, that this very peculiarity might without great care and circumspection, have been apt to give an unfavourable turn to their disposition. The distinction bestowed upon them, though not in reality for their own merit, yet in preference to the rest of the world, was not unlikely to inspire them with too high an opinion of themselves, and too contemptible a one of others; their exclusion from a free and general intercourse with the surrounding Nations, (though absolutely necessary for the most important purposes) might however tend to contract their notions and confine their Benevolence; that extreme abhorrence in which they very justly held the vices of their neighbours, might sometimes exceed the bounds of virtuous Indignation; and that unhappy though necessary task imposed upon them of destroying the sinful Nations of *Canaan*, might too easily lead them to transgress the laws of humanity on less justifiable occasions. If under these circumstances the Jews were *not* more inhuman than their neighbours they deserve I am sure the highest praise; If they *were*, there are, you see, many mitigating pleas in their favour; and the blame will not rest

rest either on the *temper of the People*, or the *temper of their Religion*.

It has I know been frequently asserted that the cruelty of the Jews, exceeded that of any other People, not only of their own times but in any age of the world. This however has been much more confidently advanced than clearly proved. From what little we can learn of the nations cotemporary with the Jews, there is not the least reason to imagine, that they were of a more merciful disposition^a; and if we hear less of their cruelty, it is because we know less of their history. What renders this extremely probable is, that in much later ages when the minds of Men were greatly softened and subdued by the improvements of civil life, we meet with much less real, though more ostentatious, humanity than amongst the Jews; and I believe there are very few here, whose recollection will not readily supply them with repeated instances of cruelty, in the most flourishing periods of the most civilized Heathens, which do at least equal any that can be produced from the most

^a On the contrary from the horrid custom which we know prevailed amongst the Canaanites of sacrificing their children to their idols, we may rationally presume that the Jews were much outdone in acts of barbarity by their Neighbours.

sanguinary transactions of the Jewish people°.

Whatever were the inhumanities of the Israelites, they had not however that aggravation, with which those of the Pagans were frequently attended, that of being exercised on their own country-men, their most faithful dependants, their nearest Relations, and dearest Friends. The proofs of their cruelty are principally, if not wholly, taken from their treatment of the idolatrous Nations around them. But when we reflect that the laws of Nature, and the rights of Nations, were not then so clearly ascertained as they

° The truth of this position is amply confirmed by the most authentic evidence — more particularly by the sanguinary factions and revolutions of the Grecian commonwealths; by the incessant butcheries in Sicily, and other Places, described in Diodorus Siculus; by the war of the Mercenaries to be found in Polybius — by the well-known Massacres, Proscriptions, Poisonings, and assassinations, that stained the later annals of the Roman People, and the exquisite torments inflicted on the persecuted christians — these were the practices of the most *humane* Pagans. — The history of the eastern Nations, and American Indians exhibits throughout such Scenes of despotic fury, of popular brutality, and all the madness of Revenge, as make humanity recoil at the very recital. So much reason had the Historian of *David* for his assertion p. 58; that it would not be easy to *select* any period of any History more bloody than that part of the Jewish Story, which is then the object of his attention. It is not indeed easy to *select*, where *all* is murder and desolation. Vid. *Considerations on the theory of Religion*, p. 232. 3d Edition; and *Account of the European Settlements in America*. Vol. I. ch. 4. p. 187.

have

have since been; that wars were then waged on savage, unrelenting, exterminating principles; and that those Nations which felt the weight of their heaviest vengeance were not only their avowed and inveterate enemies, but so incorrigibly and abominably flagitious* as to call aloud for punishment, of which the Jews were only Instruments in the hand of the Almighty; it will be easily seen that such proofs are by no means pertinent and satisfactory. The truth is, these transient and casual instances of cruelty, though they are such as at first sight are apt to strike and to offend us most; yet are not so proper to determine a national character and denominate a People constitutionally barbarous; as those *established* and *permanent* maxims of internal and domestic cruelty^q, which never existed in the Jewish Government, but were universally received and practised, were encouraged by the laws, and applauded by the Historians, of those very Nations who esteemed and called all others in respect of themselves, barbarians. It is these which

* See a detail of their execrable Vices. *Lev. xviii.*

^q The well-known customs, of exposing Infants; exhibiting gladiatorial shews, of murdering, torturing, and tyrannizing over their slaves are here alluded to; besides many others of inferior note that might be easily produced, *Vid. Seneca, Ep. 7. 47. 122. De Ira, L. 1. C. 15.*

though less insisted on by writers, and less attended to by Readers, are yet more repugnant to humanity; more destructive to the species, and more characteristic and decisive evidences of a malevolent spirit, than those accidental outrages and excesses, on which Historians generally lavish all the horrors of description.

I am aware indeed that the extirpation of the Canaanites was enjoined by the Jewish laws, and that they were forbid by no less than Divine authority to show them any mercy or compassion. This is true; and at the same time very consistent with a dispensation in the main benevolent^r. For when we consider God in the light he should always in respect to those times be considered in, not only as the common Governour of all mankind, but as the more immediate Ruler and Legislator of the Jewish nation; and as enforcing obedience to his authority, amongst *the Jews in par-*

^r The absolute necessity of extirpating the Canaanites, or at least destroying their national polity — the peculiar propriety of doing this by the sword of the Jews — the great and benevolent purposes that were answered by their separation from the World — the advantages that *all other Nations* derived from it — and many other particulars of the divine Oeconomy with regard to this extraordinary people — See clearly and concisely explained in Dr. Law's excellent *Considerations on the Theory of Religion*; from p. 82. to 98. 4th Edition.

ticular,

icular, amongst *all* Nations in *some measure*, by temporal punishments and rewards; it was no ~~more~~ a violation of mercy in *him* to enact or in *them* to execute such a penal law against the Canaanites; than it would be in a *Prince*, to punish his rebellious Subjects by the hands of his faithful ones, or in *them* to inflict that punishment. Such examples of severity are necessary to the very being of a state, and serve at once to repress the insolence of the wicked and to secure the obedience of the good.

If this exception be, as it certainly ought to be, admitted; and if we make such other equitable allowances, as the state of Religion, and the state of Society at that time do necessarily require; the Mosaical law, will, I am persuaded, appear infinitely superiour in point of humanity to all the institutions of the most celebrated lawgivers of antiquity.* It abounds with injunctions of Mercy and Pity not only to Jews, but to strangers, to enemies, and even to those who had most cruelly and injuriously oppressed them. — “If

* The laws of Draco were writ with blood. — The laws of Lycurgus were inexpressibly rigorous — Solon authorized the murder of infants; Plato, of slaves. — The laws of the twelve Tables were full of the most shocking capital punishments. The frightful barbarity of the Japonese laws. See in L'Esprit des Loix. L. 6. Ch. 13.

" thy brother be waxen poor and fallen in
 " decay with thee; then thou shalt relieve
 " him; yea though he be a *stranger* or a so-
 " journeyer, that he may live with thee. Take
 " thou no usury of him, or increase; but
 " fear thy God that thy brother may live
 " with thee. *Lev. xxv. 35, 36.* Thou shalt
 " not oppress a stranger. *Ex. xxiii. 9.* Thou
 " shalt love him as thyself. *Lev. xix. 34.*
 " Thou shalt not abhor an Edomite, Thou
 " shalt not abhor an *Ægyptian*. *Deut. xxiii.*
 " 7. If thou meet thine *Enemy's* ox or his
 " ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring
 " it back to him." — The dispositions in fa-
 " vour of the poor are truly singular and
 " amiable. — " Thou shalt not harden thy
 " heart, nor shut thy hand from thy poor
 " brother; but thou shalt open thy hand
 " wide unto him; and shalt surely lend
 " him sufficient for his need. *Deut. xv. 7, 8.*
 " When ye reap the harvest of your land,
 " thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of
 " thy field; neither shalt thou gather the
 " gleanings of thy harvest; and if thou have
 " forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not
 " go again to fetch it; and when thou beat-
 " est thine olive tree thou shalt not go over
 " the boughs again; when thou gatherest
 " the

"the grapes of thy vineyard, thou shalt not
 "glean it afterwards; it shall be for the
 "stranger, the fatherless, and the widow.
Lev. xix. 9. 10. Deut. xxiv. 19. &c."—The pro-
 visions made for the security and comfort of
 that most useful, though too often most
 wretched, part of the species, slaves and ser-
 vants, are entirely worthy of a law that came
 down from Heaven. That absolute and un-
 limited power over the lives of their slaves in-
 dulg'd to their tyrannical Masters by almost
 all heathen lawgivers, a power most scandal-
 ously abused to the disgrace of all humanity,
 was effectually restrained by the Jewish law
 which enacted a very severe punishment for
 the murder of a Slave. *Exod. xxi. 20.* The
 kindness enjoined towards hired servants is
 most remarkable.—"Thou shalt not oppress
 "a hired servant that is poor and needy;
 "whether he be of thy brethren or of thy
 "strangers that are in the land within thy
 "gates. At his day thou shalt give him his
 "hire; neither shall the Sun go down upon
 "it; for he is poor and setteth his heart
 "upon it. *Deut. xxiv. 14, 15.* Thou shalt not
 "rule over thy brother with rigour. *Lev.*
 "xxv. 43. In the seventh year thou shalt let
 "him

“ him go free from thee ; and thou shalt not
 “ let him go away empty ; but thou shalt fur-
 “ nish him liberally out of thy flock, and out
 “ of thy floor ; and out of thy wine-press,
 “ and out of that wherewith the Lord thy
 “ God hath blessed thee, thou shalt give un-
 “ to him. *Deut. xv. 12, 13.*” — The utmost

care in short is taken throughout to guard
 against every species of tyranny and oppressi-
 on, and to protect the helpless and weak
 from the wanton insolence of prosperity and
 power. The tendernefs of the divine Legisla-
 tor thought no Creature below its notice,
 and extended itself to the minutest articles of
 social and domestic life, which though unno-
 ticed by less benevolent lawgivers, do in fact
 constitute a very great and essential part of
 human happiness and misery.

With such heavenly institutions as these is
 every page of the Jewish law replete : It is
 from these we are to form our judgement of
 their Religion and its divine Author ; and if
 these had their proper effect on the manners of
 the People, they must have produced upon
 the whole a constant and habitual (though
 perhaps from the very nature of their situation
 a confined) Benevolence, much superiour not
 only to that of their rude cotemporaries, but
 to

to the boasted Lenity of much later and more polished Nations *.

It will be readily understood that every thing which has been here said to vindicate the Jewish Nation in general from the charge of *distinguished* cruelty, is applicable to king *David* in particular. But he may also lay claim to some peculiar indulgence from the singularity of his own circumstances which were frequently very unfavourable to humanity. It was his fortune to pass through almost every scene of life, and to meet with almost every incident in his way, that could be injurious to his temper or give an edge to his resentments. Extremes of happiness or misery; sudden transitions from the one to the other; the persecution of enemies, and the unkindness of friends, are circumstances which seldom fail of hurting the mind, and vitiating the most benevolent disposition. All these did *David* experience in quick succession, and in their fullest extent.

He was originally nothing more than a shepherd, and at a time when his youth and

* In fact to any one who has the least disposition to examine their History impartially it will appear that their laws had this general good influence upon them, whenever they were under any regular form of government, except the times immediately preceeding its final dissolution. —

inexperience seemed to disqualify him for any more important business, than that of feeding a flock, he broke out at once the champion and preserver of his country. Transplanted on a sudden from a cottage to a court, he experienced alternately the smiles and frowns of a capricious monarch, was sometimes flattered with the hopes of being united to him by the closest bonds of affinity, and sometimes in danger of being struck by him with a javelin to the wall. — Driven at length from his presence, and torn from the arms of those he loved; his soul was hunted from city to city; and after suffering the last distresses of human nature, he was not only restored to the honours he had lost, but seated on the throne of *Israel*. — And here, though surrounded with all the pleasures and magnificence of an Eastern monarch; yet was he at the same time not only harassed with the common uneasinesses of life, and the cares inseparable from royalty, but experienced a succession of the bitterest sufferings and the heaviest domestic calamities; was once more driven from *Jerusalem*, deserted by his friends, cursed by his enemies, and persecuted by his darling son; whose death did indeed put a period to his public calamities; but plunged him in
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the deepest affliction, and was very near bringing down his grey hairs with sorrow to the grave.

When to these private considerations we add those more general ones abovementioned, we can hardly be surprized at any excesses of severity that King *David* gave way to. We shall rather be surprized to find, in so tumultuous and military a kind of life, many striking instances of humanity, many amiable tenderneſſes, many uncommon and heroical exertions of generosity, which plainly indicated a temper constitutionally good and right, but labouring under the weight of numberless disadvantages, which sometimes dragged it from its true bias, and forced it to take a turn directly opposite to its natural bent. His circumstances exposed him to a variety of injuries and insults; the liveliness of his sensations made him *feel* them; the impetuosity of his passions made him *resent* them too strongly. And yet though every thing thus concurred to stimulate his revenge, though the guilt of indulging it was not then so apparent and so acknowledged as it now is; yet did he on one memorable occasion * resist the strongest impulses of this most importunate and ungovernable passion; though tempted

* 1 Sam. xxiv.

to gratify it by the most inviting opportunity on his most inveterate enemy, whose past conduct would almost have justified any extremity; and whose removal would not only have put an immediate end to his distresses, but, in all appearance, opened his way to the attainment of his utmost wishes, and have raised him at once from an exile to a king^u.

Let us then do justice to the merits of *David*, and the choice of the Almighty. There is I know not what ill-natured pleasure that some men take in depreciating an illustrious character, especially if it has received any peculiar marks of distinction. But not to men-

^u The generosity and heroism which *David* displayed in this instance can be exceeded by nothing, but the perverseness and rancour of his late Historian, who endeavours (p. 25.) in direct opposition to the plain natural appearance of the fact, upon the sole strength of a supposition, unsupported by the least shadow of evidence or probability, to destroy the whole merit of this transaction, and to refine away the noblest exertion of the noblest moral virtue into a little mean political artifice, which was absolutely needless, and which we may venture to say, never had a place in *David's* heart, nor, I believe, in any head except that of our author. — When a man, who is for ever professing the utmost candour and impartiality, who declares that he will never put a forced construction upon any thing, nor represent it in any light but that which it naturally appears in, (*Pref.* p. 12.) is capable of thus converting the most obvious qualities of actions into their opposites, and doing such manifest violence to every rule of judging and every dictate of honesty (of which this is but one instance out of many), the reader will easily see what regard is to be paid to his assertions, what opinion to be formed of the *Purity* of his intentions.

tion that respect which is always due to greatness, we ought surely, where God himself has bestowed any signs of approbation, to suppose that they are not misplaced. If truth requires that we should not spare the failings even of the most sacred personages, yet religion, and a reverence for the Deity, do equally require, that we should tread on such dangerous ground with the utmost caution; that we should be rejoiced to find ourselves mistaken; and blame at last, if we are forced to blame, with that reluctance, that candor, that diffidence, modesty, and humility, which become such fallible and incompetent judges, as we must for ever be, of the secret springs and motives both of human actions and divine counsels.

It must be confessed, that the conduct of King *David* does in too many instances lay him open to reproach, and gives occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme. But for this very reason there is no necessity to load him with more than his share of guilt, to aggravate his real vices, and impute to him imaginary ones. His crimes were great and notorious: they appeared so to him, they must appear so to every one. Whoever therefore sets him up as a model of imitation, does a very dangerous thing; but at the same time

whoever marks him out as an object of abhorrence does a very unjust one. We ought most carefully to distinguish betwixt his public and his private character. As a King, he had qualities which rendered him the properest person in the world, to sit on the throne of *Israel* at a certain period; and for that reason, and that only, was justly entitled to the appellation with which he was distinguished. As a Man, he was subject to vices, which God was so far from approving, that he severely punished them; which were recorded not as an ensample, but as a warning; not that we should follow, but that we should flee them. If they appear odious in a Jewish Prince, who had to plead in his excuse, the temptations of a court, the manners of the times, the particularity of his own circumstances, and the liberties indulged by his Religion; they must assume a much more frightful aspect in a private Christian, who has none of these softening pleas to offer, who lives in much more enlightened and civilized times, has much stricter rules of conduct prescribed to him, is called to a much higher degree of purity and holiness, has far more terrible punishments to work upon his fears and more glorious rewards to animate his hopes.

And

And yet with all these advantages there are few of us, I fear, that can boast of having carried certain virtues, and those too of the most exalted kind to so high a pitch, as did this so much injured prince. Though his deviations from the right path were sudden, irregular, and violent; yet he returned to it again so eagerly, and pursued it so indefatigably, that he seemed to have acquired new strength from his fall, and the memory of his offence was lost in the depth of his contrition. That warmth of constitution which often shot out into such vicious excesses, gave at the same time a certain vigour and alacrity to his virtues, a certain honest enthusiasm to his piety, a certain amiable extravagance to all the generous emotions of his heart, which raised them far above the common level, and marked them peculiarly for his own. His mind was open, naked, and unguarded; Exposed of course to the worst impressions, but susceptible also of the best. He had a sensibility of soul, which though it gave too keen an edge both to his relish of pleasure, and his resentment of injury, yet made him, most feelingly alive to the noblest and the tenderest sentiments, and inspired him with every liberal and social affection, that can warm the human breast. He had a boundless zeal for
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the honour of God, and the preservation of the true Religion; a most passionate fondness for his country; and such a warmth and immutability in his private attachments, as reflect the highest honour on his memory, and most clearly evince the native goodness of his heart. These are not the qualities of a *Nero*, a *Caligula*, or a *Domitian*; (names which have been impiously ranked with his) they never *can* inhabit a breast utterly devoid of humanity; or consist with a disposition constitutionally and habitually bad. Yet these qualities were unquestionable parts of *David's* character, and after all that the utmost ingenuity of malevolence can find out to blame in his conduct, he cannot by his bitterest revilers be denied the praise of a most strenuous assertor of God's Laws, a most disinterested Patriot, the tenderest of Parents, and the most affectionate of Friends.

F I N I S.

ERRATA.

Page 6. l. 25. read, 1 Kings xi. 4.

p. 7. Note. in two places read, 1 Kings xv. 5.

p. 18. Note. read, 3d Edition.

p. 20. l. 14. insert, *Exod. xxiii. 4.*

